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ABSTRACT

One of a series of work-based interviews about occupations in Australia, this booklet presents an interview with 13 young women police constables about their jobs. The following questions are answered: what police constables do, what they do on the job, how they handle job stress and relationships, what they do and don't like about it, what kind of training was needed, their co-workers, and how the work contributes to society. Cartoons are used to enliven the material, and a glossary listing 46 words is included. Although designed to be used in literacy classes with adult new readers, the booklets are also appropriate for use with elementary and secondary students in career exploration and career education. (KC)

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Hazel Edwards'

Workdays

a day in the life of ...



Police Constables

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Workdays

a day in the life of ...

Police Constables

13 Policewomen

Aged Varies

Workdays
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Police Constables

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That's a lady policeman' said the little boy in the shopping centre as the uniformed constable walked past. *Increasingly*, police persons are female.

13 women constables who had just completed their *Retention Advanced Phase* at the *Police Academy* were asked to discuss what being 'in the job' involved for a policewoman.

HOW NEW TO POLICE LIFE ARE THE 13 WOMEN CONSTABLES?

With less than two years experience, they were still *relatively* new to the police life.

WHAT IS THE AVERAGE AGE OF THE WOMEN?

Average age was twenty-two.

HOW MANY FEMALES IN A SQUAD?

With a squad of 27-28 members, approximately 30% would be female.

WHAT DID THE WOMEN CONSTABLES DO 'IN THE JOB' BEFORE RETURNING FOR THE RETENTION PHASE?

Each had *concentrated* experience in the several months between leaving the Academy after the *initial* eighteen weeks training, being appointed to various stations, and then returning for the Retention Phase.

WHAT KIND OF A CAREER IS THERE FOR A WOMAN CONSTABLE?

One constable has decided to stay 'in the job'. She wants to study for her senior constable's exams as soon as possible.

**DID ANYONE HAVE ANY DOUBTS
ABOUT THE JOB?**

"Being 'in the job' is another world",
admitted one constable who had doubts
about staying during her initial training.

**CAN POLICEWOMEN STAY IN THE
POLICE FORCE AFTER MARRIAGE
AND CHILDREN?**

The choice is no longer between marriage
and a career for policewomen.

**DO MANY STAY 'IN THE JOB' AFTER
PREGNANCY?**

Most stay on during their first pregnancy
and many return to work soon after.

DO CHILDREN MAKE THE JOB MORE DIFFICULT?

Some constables, male and female, find that once they have children of their own, handling certain cases such as child abuse, become too close.

ARE THERE ANY GRIPEs ABOUT THE UNIFORM?

Strong views are held about uniform regulations by young police. Not being able to wear earrings is a *current gripe*. Recently a special uniform was designed for pregnant police.

HOW DOES THE JOB AFFECT YOU PHYSICALLY?

"Physically, if you get into a station where they play sport, that helps keep you fit. Otherwise the fast food and odd hours are bad for your health".

WHAT ELSE CAN AFFECT YOUR HEALTH?

"If you get into a drinking station, where the accepted way of *relieving* stress is to drink, that's bad news. Plenty of overweight police around".

DOES IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE WHETHER YOU'RE A MALE OR A FEMALE COP?

Opinions varied. "It's not quite the same as for a guy. But there's a lot of fellow feeling especially for your squad members. It depends which station you're sent to".

IN WHAT WAY IS IT DIFFERENT FOR A WOMAN CONSTABLE?

"There is sexual *discrimination*".

ARE THERE SEXUAL PRESSURES FROM THE GENERAL PUBLIC?

"There are sexual pressures. They try it on. The uniform attracts comments. Being called '*hunch*' hurts at first. Then at times like New Year's Eve, everybody wants to kiss a uniformed policewoman".

WHAT ABOUT STRESSES?

"If you're lucky enough to get a Senior who listens after a bad shift, that's a better way of *letting down*".

WHAT DO YOU DO IF THERE IS NOBODY TO LISTEN?

"Some say that policewomen shouldn't cry. That's stupid. There are times when it's right for a man or a woman to cry. Stress comes from holding it all in".

WHAT OTHER KIND OF HELP IS THERE?

'Comradeship' and reliance on 'your partner' was evident in the emotional support demonstrated during the interview. Despite the formal habit of referring to each other by surname, due to the Academy name tags, each was supportive.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WORKING WITH A MALE POLICEMAN?

There were a range of opinions on mixed working partnerships. "Personally, I prefer to work with a male partner. You've got that added strength, just in case. You've got the brains and they've got the *brawn*". This was said with a laugh.

DO SOME OF THE POLICEMEN LIKE WORKING WITH FEMALES?

"Some males like to work with a female. She tones down the arguments. Usually the



Boy Sarge, that groin kick-jugular thumb
grip-elbow punch-knee to the stomach,
REALLY WORKS!

older guys will calm down if a policewoman comes in. The *younger bucks* are a different matter".

WHAT ABOUT OLDER POLICEMEN?

"Some of the older men are *paternalistic* and don't think that 'girls' should be *rostered* on the *divi-van*".

WHAT ABOUT OTHER POLICEMEN?

"Others get annoyed if the rosters favour the women, and that's fair enough if it means more night duty for them".

WHAT IS THE FEELING ABOUT A POLICEWOMAN WORKING IN A DIVI-VAN?

One Senior Sergeant stated his opinion. "There's a worry when you send one girl. The worry is that her male partner will protect her first, instead of getting on with the job".

WHAT IS THE FEELING ABOUT TWO POLICEWOMEN WORKING TOGETHER?

The Senior Sergeant said, "You can't send two girls in a divi-van to a brawl. It's difficult to send a policewoman to do *a muscle job*. None of us wants to see one of our own get hurt". The young constables disagree.

WHAT DID THE YOUNG CONSTABLES SAY?

"Partners alway try to protect each other, whether they're male or female. And divi-vans are the workhorse of a police station. If we don't do our share that's unfair to other police".

IS THERE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST OTHER RACES?

"I admit that I'm prejudiced. But I'd never let it interfere with my work", said a 22 year

old who claimed to have developed fixed views on 'ethnics' over the past few years.

WHY?

"They say they don't understand English and they do. That gets me".

IS THIS LACK OF EXPERIENCE WITH OTHER RACES BEING OVERCOME?

"Recently a broader recruiting pattern has aimed at encouraging those of varied ethnic backgrounds to join the police".

HOW DOES IT FEEL WHEN YOU NEED TO CONTROL PEOPLE OLDER THAN YOURSELVES?

"I go to *domestics* at times and they're old enough to be my parents and fighting over the stupidest things. Like the neighbour's dog looking over the fence and barking at the children. Sometimes I feel like saying, 'Why don't you bloody grow up? Act your age for a change'".

HOW IS THE SITUATION HANDLED?

Usually my partner, who's a senior constable, says, "Sit down. Shut Up. Let's talk it out. This has the best effect because he is the senior partner".

DO UPSET PEOPLE PREFER TO LISTEN TO A MALE CONSTABLE?

Di, a twenty year old suggested another reason. "Some of us find it difficult to act as a *mediator* because our parents didn't fight, or we're not married".

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST DIFFICULT EXPERIENCE?

Others find the first death the most difficult to handle. "Going to a *post-mortem* during training at the Academy was hard. Two of the guys fainted".

DO YOU GET ANGRY ABOUT SOME SITUATIONS?

Anger at unnecessary *tragedy* due to ignorance can *frustrate* the police who have to deal with the *consequences*. "I felt anger at the unnecessary death of a young man".

WHAT HAPPENED?

"A mistake was made. His head was in the wrong position and because there was a lack of first aid knowledge, he died".

HOW HAVE YOU DEALT WITH A DEATH?

Going to a *fatal* and finding it's someone you know is the worst fear of most young police. "I couldn't sleep the night I went to my first fatal".

**CAN YOU GIVE SOME DETAIL
ABOUT THE DEATH?**

"It was a ninety year old who'd walked in front of a car. She could have been my Nanna. Then you come back to the station and someone says, 'Would you like a pie and sauce for lunch?'"

HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOU?

"The *insensitivity* gets to you at times".

**DO YOU REMEMBER ANY
PARTICULAR DEATHS?**

"One of the bad ones I went to. I went to a murder where the guy was stabbed in the heart".

HOW DID YOU SLEEP THAT PARTICULAR NIGHT?

"I dreamt that Jan, (a fellow constable) was stabbed in the heart. You don't really get used to it".

HOW DO YOU TELL THE FAMILIES ABOUT SUCH A DEATH?

Telling a relative is another feared task. "The thing that *cracked me up* was when they told the wife. Seeing the mother. How she reacted".

WHAT IS THE MOST DIFFICULT OF ALL DEATHS TO DEAL WITH?

They all agree that the death of a child is the hardest to handle. "Especially cot deaths". One twenty year old constable has handled thirteen deaths in eighteen months.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH DEATH AS A WORK GROUP?

There is the M.A.S.H. type of humour which develops as a way of handling the tragedy. "Lots of jokes about delivering death messages. 'Are you the widow Brown?' That sort of thing".

WHAT ABOUT FAMILY INTERVENTION CASES?

Family *intervention* in relation to *maltreated* children is a worry. "If something *atrocious* has happened, the decision is easy. It's the in between cases which are difficult".

WHAT ABOUT VERBAL ABUSE?

Verbal abuse of the police at demonstrations can be *provoking*, but "Keep your mouth shut at demonstrations" is the advice of more experienced police.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR OWN VIEWS?

Those with personal views on nuclear disarmament or the rights of dairy farmers find the conflict between those views and doing the job can be difficult.

FOR WHAT REASON?

"When you are seen as part of 'The System' or 'The Government' while still personally having sympathy for the cause about which the demonstration is being held, is a bit hard to take", said a policewoman from a farming family.

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION OF THE PUBLIC IN GENERAL?

The mixed *morality* of the public puzzles them at first. "You can call a person a liar more easily than you can call them a bad driver. Socially you don't talk about being a thief, but a traffic *infringement* is OK".

DO YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR JOB TO OUTSIDERS?

On social occasions when the *inevitable* question of "What do you do?" is asked, many police say "I work for the government" as a way of avoiding endless speeding-fine stories.

DO POLICE HAVE THEIR OWN INHOUSE JARGON?

As with other occupations the police have their own jargon. Some are based on the numerical classification of certain offences. Police jargon is another language for most *recruits*.

WOULD YOU GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF SOME JARGON?

"A 'dirty thirty' is a drunk who is likely to be messy. And it's easier to wash out the back of the divi-van than clean out the back seat of a police car".

IS POLICE JARGON USED OVER THE RADIO?

"On the radio to save time, a numerical code is used, so a 12 and 16 is a car accident with a person injured".

WOULD YOU GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF OTHER CODES?

"On the running sheets, where police must record their activities, *abbreviations* are used. T.W.Y. is trouble with youths. P.I.N. is parking infringement notice. N.P.H. is no person home".

ARE POLICE MORE AT EASE WITH OTHER POLICE SOCIALLY?

'Police with police' is one of the *criticisms* made of the limited social contacts of some members of the force. There are reasons for this such as the stress *associated* with *traumatic* work which might include 'scraping a person off the road'. Other police understand.

**DO PEOPLE WHO WORK IN OTHER
AREAS OF TRAUMA UNDERSTAND
HOW POLICE CONSTABLES FEEL?**

Yes, that's why several of the young male constables married nurses from the emergency wards.

ANY OTHER REASON?

Apart from being the only girls they meet on their night shifts, the nurses understand the effects of the tragedy. Perhaps, in the future, some male nurses will marry women constables for the same reason.

**HOW HAVE YOU FOUND YOU'VE
CHANGED SINCE BECOMING
POLICEWOMEN?**

"When we started our training, most of the recruits had boyfriends outside. Some were even engaged. But those relationships broke up".

WHAT DO YOU THINK CAUSED THE CHANGES?

"Girls grow so much in a few months. Their experiences widen from handling different people in a variety of situations".

WHY DO ATTITUDES CHANGE?

Attitudes to relationships change. "When you see the way some women are bashed around in their relationships...it makes you careful. You need the reminder of ordinary company with family and outside friends".

HOW DO THESE EXPERIENCES CHANGE WOMEN?

They become more *assertive*. "When I went home, I walked into one of the local shops and asked for something. They were messing me around and I just told them firmly what I wanted. I wasn't rude, just assertive".



As a matter of fact Constable Perkins... I'm afraid the squad doesn't feel you've passed muster for undercover work just yet.

WHAT DID YOUR MOTHER SAY?

"My mum reckoned I'd changed a lot; for the better, mainly".

DO POLICEWOMEN PREFER PARTICULAR AREAS OF WORK?

"Many constables join the Community Policing Squads which have educational and operational roles".

WHAT AREAS DO COMMUNITY POLICING SQUADS WORK IN?

"These areas include Stranger Awareness, Safety House program, Bicycle Safety, and Truancy which is related to burglary as well as the Children's Court for youth under seventeen".

**ARE THERE AREAS WHERE THE
POLICEWOMEN DO NOT WORK?**

"Certain specialities do not have
policewomen working in those areas".

FOR EXAMPLE?

"The Dog Squad requires handlers with
families because the dog lives with the
household. And most young women
constables do not have their own families".

**WHAT TRAINING ARE YOU GIVEN
FOR WORKING WITH YOUNG
PEOPLE?**

"Varied skills are needed. During
Probationary Constable Training, we attend
Blue Light Discos, meet with a youth worker
and accompany school speakers for an
educational lecture. You get around".

**WHERE ARE YOUNG POLICE
RECRUITS TRAINED?**

"Ironically, in Victoria, the training of young constables occurs under a former monastery's roof where the high cross has been topped by police radio aerials on the Police Training Academy".

HOW LONG IS THE TRAINING FOR?

"Eighteen weeks is spent at the Academy". Sworn in on the first day, recruits worry about a range of issues.

**DO RECRUITS DROP OUT OF THE
COURSE DURING THE EIGHTEEN
WEEKS?**

"Some recruits drop out during training. Male and female".



Yes sirree... you've made my day punk!

WHY?

"Either they can't cope academically with the heavily law-based course, or they have unrealistic expectations".

DO THE WOMEN PERFORM AS WELL AS THE MEN?

"Many of the lecturers claim that the female students on average perform better academically".

HAVE ANY WOMEN PERFORMED BETTER THAN THE MEN?

"Several women have been *dux* of their squad".

WHAT ABOUT REGULAR PROCEDURES?

"The power of arrest is their bread and butter", explains one of the law instructors.

CAN THERE BE PROBLEMS WITH ARRESTS?

"Lots of sleepless nights over counter summonses, after using force to arrest the one arrested. Sometimes it takes two or three to handcuff a reluctant arrestee".

WHAT IS THE TRAINING FOR COURT AND WHAT HAPPENS?

"Performing in court can be a nerve racking experience for young constables unused to public speaking. During their training, they participate in a *mock* court, but the real court is more demanding".

IN WHAT WAY?

"When you first start, there are so many little formal things to be learnt. Like not moving in court when the oaths are given".

DO YOU NEED A GOOD MEMORY?

"Good recall is needed. Referring to your notes to refresh your memory is a privilege, not a right, so you have to remember a case which may have occurred months ago".

WHAT DO THE LECTURERS ENCOURAGE?

"Recruits are encouraged to reason but many slip into rote learning and standardised responses to cover the accumulation of detail necessary to handle court appearances, correct procedures and cope with daily occurrences such as 'domestics'".

IS THERE ANY PSYCHOLOGY TRAINING?

"Human Behaviour courses, commonly known as H.B. teach crisis intervention and anger control. In the Retention Advanced Phase when recruits return at the end of two years, further work in psychology is done".

WHAT KIND OF ENQUIRIES WOULD BE HANDLED OVER THE PHONE?

"Police are expected to be problem solvers *extraordinaire*.. So the switchboard gets some strange enquiries".

HAS ANYTHING FUNNY HAPPENED?

An elderly lady rang to report that someone had disturbed her prize canaries during the night. That was noted. Then a later caller reported. "I've got a canary on my car and don't know how to get it off". This *intrigued* the new switchboard operator, who was unfamiliar with police terms until it was explained that an unroadworthy certificate is yellow.

"Stickers are known as canaries. The two 'canaries' were unrelated".

**WHAT DO YOU FEEL YOU NEED TO
HANDLE THE JOB?**

"You pack in so many experiences in a short time. Basically you need commonsense and the skills of handling people. But you also need a private life where you can switch off".

GLOSSARY

<i>increasingly</i>	<i>more than before</i>
<i>Retention</i>	
<i>Advanced Phase</i>	<i>training</i>
<i>Police Academy</i>	<i>training centre for police only</i>
<i>in the job</i>	<i>Australian slang jargon for being in the Police force</i>
<i>relatively</i>	<i>fairly or equally</i>
<i>concentrated</i>	<i>intense and short</i>
<i>initial</i>	<i>first</i>
<i>current gripe</i>	<i>complaint at this particular time</i>
<i>relieving</i>	<i>easing</i>
<i>discrimination</i>	<i>to make obvious anything which is different</i>
<i>'butch'</i>	<i>Australian slang jargon for a type of woman</i>
<i>letting down</i>	<i>calming down</i>
<i>brawn</i>	<i>body strength</i>
<i>younger bucks</i>	<i>Australian slang jargon for young men</i>
<i>paternalistic</i>	<i>father-like</i>

GLOSSARY CONTINUED

<i>rostered</i>	<i>listed for work times</i>
<i>divi-van</i>	<i>Australian slang jargon for a police van</i>
<i>to do a muscle job</i>	<i>use personal body strength</i>
<i>ethnics</i>	<i>people from other cultures</i>
<i>domestics</i>	<i>police slang for fights at home</i>
<i>mediator</i>	<i>one who helps settle arguments</i>
<i>post-mortem</i>	<i>examination to see how or why a person has died</i>
<i>tragedy</i>	<i>unhappy event</i>
<i>frustrate</i>	<i>upset</i>
<i>consequences</i>	<i>results</i>
<i>fatal</i>	<i>police slang for a death</i>
<i>insensitivity</i>	<i>lack of awareness or feeling</i>
<i>cracked me up</i>	<i>Australian slang jargon for upsetting</i>
<i>intervention</i>	<i>interference</i>
<i>maltreated</i>	<i>badly hurt</i>
<i>atrocious</i>	<i>very bad</i>

GLOSSARY CONTINUED

<i>provoking</i>	<i>upsetting or irritating</i>
<i>morality</i>	<i>personal and social values</i>
<i>infringement</i>	<i>break a law</i>
<i>inevitable</i>	<i>can't be avoided</i>
<i>recruits</i>	<i>new members</i>
<i>abbreviations</i>	<i>shorter meanings for words</i>
<i>criticisms</i>	<i>fault finding judgement</i>
<i>associated</i>	<i>connected</i>
<i>traumatic</i>	<i>violent</i>
<i>attitudes</i>	<i>personal ideas and views</i>
<i>assertive</i>	<i>being direct</i>
<i>probationary</i>	<i>trialing</i>
<i>dux</i>	<i>top of the class</i>
<i>mock</i>	<i>pretend</i>
<i>ex:raordinaire</i>	<i>unusually skilled</i>
<i>intrigued</i>	<i>roused curiosity</i>

Hazel Edwards'

Workdays

a day in the life of ...

A collection of simply written, work-based interviews, to give an insight into others' workstyles for beginning adult readers. The subjects were chosen to cover a range of occupations and workplace situations in Australia including the self-employed, franchisee, professional, trade and semi-skilled.

'A day in the life of ...' series focuses on twenty people in varied occupations by profiling them through the technique of interview.

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Workdays is based on real people in real jobs. The aim of the series is to provide simply written, interesting and relevant material for new readers.

Author Hazel Edwards' method of researching is by interview and visiting the workplace.

Her previous one hundred books have included adult literacy, scripts, non-fiction, crime and childrens books. Currently she is researching other workplaces for more books in the 'day in a life of' series.

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the Chef

Vet Nurse

Computer Salesman

Offshore Platform Worker

Police

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